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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUTHAURA (Kenya)

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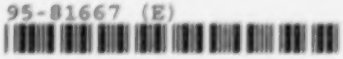

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 82: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (continued) (A/50/46; A/C.4/50/L.2)

1. Mr. KONCKE (Uruguay) said that his delegation was aware of the danger which atomic radiation presented for present and future generations and highly valued the important work being done by the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation; he urged it to continue its activity, which had been and would continue to be of considerable benefit to all Member States.

2. It was a highly positive sign that during the current year a great many countries had endorsed the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which was a suitable mechanism for fostering the process of gradual disarmament and eliminating such weapons. However, the conscientious approach of a majority of States to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons was not enough; what was needed was a conscientious approach by all members of the international community. In that connection he expressed his regret at the underground tests that had been conducted by certain nuclear Powers.

3. Uruguay considered it exceptionally important that it had been possible in Main Committee III of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to reach agreement concerning a document on the safe transport by sea of nuclear fuel, plutonium and highly radioactive nuclear waste in conformity with the norms of international law. He urged the States which had signed the document to pursue efforts within the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to develop new measures in that field and to establish cooperation and exchanges of information.

4. He considered it a major achievement that the States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons had agreed that liability mechanisms were an important method of compensating an injured State for damage sustained as a result of the transport of nuclear material.

5. It was necessary to acknowledge once and for all that atomic radiation was capable of causing considerable damage, but such damage could take on catastrophic proportions in small States and manifest itself in heavy loss of human life and industrial and economic collapse. The Chernobyl accident, which had occurred in a small country and caused irreparable damage to the health of the population and the local economy, was a good example. The research which was being carried out under the guidance of the Scientific Committee into the possible connection between cancers and radiation exposure should help to broaden knowledge about those diseases and encourage better prevention.

6. He requested the Chairman to hold consultations with delegations in order to rationalize the work of the Committee. Such an approach would mean studying the agenda and excluding those items which were no longer discussed, as well as switching to annual discussion of items which had formerly been discussed on a biennial basis but which had proved to be important, such as the protection and security of small States.

7. Mr. RAI (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation acknowledged the important role which the Scientific Committee had played since its inception in 1955. The Committee had demonstrated competence and efficiency in the discharge of its mandate - the provision and dissemination of information on levels of ionizing radiation and radioactivity in the environment and the harmful effect of radiation on all forms of life.

8. Papua New Guinea had been instrumental in finalizing and signing the Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention), which had been opened for signature on 16 September 1995. Other regions should also make efforts to conclude similar agreements. The Treaty had been one of the many efforts made by island countries of the South Pacific, both individually and collectively through the South Pacific Forum, to keep the Pacific a nuclear-free zone.

9. Papua New Guinea deeply deplored France's decision to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific, which had demonstrated the latter country's disrespect for the unanimous position of the peoples of the region and contravened the understanding and trust on which the South Pacific countries had supported the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. If France considered it environmentally unsafe to undertake those tests on its own soil, then it was clearly immoral to conduct them in the South Pacific in the face of outrage from the region's inhabitants. The French Government should publicly state that it would assume responsibility for any future environmental damage and effects of atomic radiation on the population of the South Pacific region.

10. The hazardous waste that had been left in the Marshall Islands was clear testimony to the danger of all forms of nuclear testing. The scientific knowledge that was available when the nuclear tests had been carried out on the islands indicated that it was safe to continue testing. However, half a century later the consequences of those tests had produced a devastating effect on the inhabitants of the islands and their environment. Fearing the dreadful consequences of depositing large amounts of radioactive material in fragile atolls, the peoples of the South Pacific were therefore united in their opposition to the French Government's continued nuclear testing in the vicinity of their countries.

11. Speaking in his capacity as the representative of the country chairing the South Pacific Forum, he said that the twenty-sixth session of that organization had been held from 13 to 15 September 1995. The Forum had adopted the Waigani Convention and recalled in that context its continuing opposition to the dumping of radioactive waste at sea. It had also called for universal adherence to the prohibition of that practice by the London Convention of 1972, reiterated its support for that Convention and the need for its effective enforcement.

12. The Forum leaders had issued a statement expressing their extreme outrage at the resumption of French nuclear testing in the South Pacific and had again demanded that France should desist from any further tests. Their outrage had been compounded by the intransigence of France and the People's Republic of

China, which had persisted with their tests despite the unequivocal position of the South Pacific region. The Forum had endorsed the Lakatoro Declaration by the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Declaration of the South Pacific Environment Ministers' meeting which had been held in August 1995 in Brisbane, Australia.

13. The Forum had expressed continuing concern about shipments of plutonium and radioactive waste through the region. It had noted with appreciation the cooperation which Japan had provided in terms of information and consultation on those issues. It had also reiterated its expectation that such shipments would be undertaken in compliance with the highest international safety and security standards and in full consultation with Forum countries.

14. The Forum had welcomed the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in May 1995 as the achievement of a long-standing Forum objective. It had consistently urged universal acceptance of the Treaty as soon as possible and had called on nuclear Powers to meet their treaty obligations without delay and negotiate in good faith towards complete nuclear disarmament.

15. The Forum had called on the IAEA Standing Committee on Nuclear Liability to conclude a civil nuclear liability regime by the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident. It had expressed its support for the establishment of a credible regime including adequate compensation for victims of transboundary damage. The Forum also believed that such a regime must be capable of attracting widespread adherence from both nuclear and non-nuclear power-generating States throughout the world. The Forum had noted that, consistent with the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region (Nouméa Convention), it was important that such a regime should incorporate environmental damage within its scope.

16. The Forum had welcomed the increased attention to problems of safety and contamination related to the discontinuation of nuclear operations formerly associated with nuclear-weapon programmes. It had called on all Governments and international organizations with expertise in the field of cleaning up and disposing of radioactive contaminants to give appropriate assistance to affected countries. In addition, the Forum had noted the special responsibility of the United States of America to the population of the Marshall Islands which had been adversely affected as a result of nuclear-weapons tests conducted during the period of trusteeship. That responsibility included safe resettlement of persons who had been forced to leave their homes and the restoration to economic productivity of affected areas.

17. Mr. ZVANKO (Belarus) said that Belarus, as one of the countries stricken by the Chernobyl disaster, followed the work of the Scientific Committee with particular interest and considered its task to be one of the noblest. His delegation noted with satisfaction the topics which the Committee had selected as the most important for further study, and welcomed its intention to review new information from radiobiological and epidemiological studies.

18. His delegation was pleased to note that, as mentioned in paragraph 4 of its report (A/50/46), the Scientific Committee was aware that much information was

becoming available on the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. He was, however, somewhat puzzled by the language used and did not quite understand why in the opinion of the Scientific Committee the information on Chernobyl was only just becoming available. The information blockade on the topic of Chernobyl imposed by the Government of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had been removed as early as 1989. Belarus had been among the first countries to invite international experts and to declare its readiness to share information that its scientists had gathered by that time. All that had made it possible for the first report of a group of international experts to be published in 1991; unfortunately, being the first report of its kind, it had not produced the best results. Since then, hundreds of international experts had visited contaminated areas in Belarus, as well as in other countries affected by the Chernobyl disaster, and thousands of Belarusian children whose health had been seriously undermined by exposure to radiation had undergone medical examinations and treatment in Cuba, Germany, Israel, Italy and other countries. Belarus sincerely hoped that much would be added to the information already available, as a result of the international conferences to be held in 1996 in Geneva, Vienna and Minsk to commemorate the lamentable tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident.

19. His delegation was also surprised by the Scientific Committee's intention "to review critically all available information, in particular to clarify the possible relationships of childhood thyroid cancers to radiation exposures in Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation". He wondered if it was possible that the Scientific Committee could have any doubt regarding the fact that more than 70 per cent of Chernobyl radioactive fallout had fallen on Belarusian soil, or concerning the sharp increase in the number of cases of childhood thyroid cancers and of other cancerous, genetic and other illnesses, which was confirmed by specific figures. He wondered to what all those tragic facts could be attributed, if not to Chernobyl. The health impact of the Chernobyl disaster was even more serious and dangerous for the growing generation of Belarusians, the 3 million "children of Chernobyl".

20. His delegation therefore considered that it would be much more beneficial if the Scientific Committee, considering its scientific authority and independence of judgement, undertook an impartial and objective, rather than critical, review of Chernobyl-related information, including its own conclusions, for example, those going back to 1988. His delegation supported the Scientific Committee's plans for its future work, and was interested in the best possible outcome of that work.

21. Mr. ROWE (Australia) said that his delegation was pleased to be a sponsor of the draft resolution on the agenda item under consideration. It valued the work of the Scientific Committee highly.

22. The Australian Government remained firmly committed to the objective of complete nuclear disarmament under effective international control, and therefore urged that every effort should be made to complete a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty as soon as possible. It had strongly supported the decision to extend indefinitely the non-proliferation Treaty taken at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the parties to that Treaty. It considered that the continuation of nuclear testing by China and the recommencement of

nuclear testing by France were aberrations and belonged to a different era. His delegation congratulated the three nuclear-weapon States which were maintaining nuclear-testing moratoriums, and condemned the decisions made by the Governments of the other two nuclear-weapon States to carry out nuclear explosions.

23. Australia categorically rejected the assertion made by the representative of France that his country's nuclear tests were "innocuous" and were not environmentally harmful and that that view had been confirmed by a meeting of South Pacific Ministers of the Environment. On the contrary, at that meeting the participants had unanimously adopted the Brisbane Declaration, which called upon France, amongst other things, to conduct a prior assessment of any major project such as nuclear testing on the marine environment, and to make its data and studies available to the international community for independent and comprehensive assessment. The Declaration also expressed the determination of the countries represented to keep the South Pacific free of pollution from radioactive waste, and called upon France to undertake to sign and ratify the Protocols to the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga). By continuing to carry out nuclear tests, France had shown contempt for its international obligations and for the wishes of its Pacific partners.

24. The Prime Minister of Australia had expressed support for the provisions of the Brisbane Declaration and had called upon France to desist from further tests in the region and to close associated facilities, with the exception of those required for future environmental monitoring; to accept full and exclusive responsibility for any adverse impact from the tests it had carried out; to provide the international community with access to all scientific data and to the testing sites themselves; and to sign and ratify the Protocols to the Treaty of Rarotonga.

25. The Australian Government had welcomed the accession of China and the Russian Federation to the relevant Protocols to the Treaty. At the same time, it continued to note with disappointment that the United States, France and the United Kingdom had not yet signed and ratified those Protocols.

26. The South Pacific countries were opposed to any activity which made the ocean a dumping ground for environmentally damaging material. Noting that at its twenty-sixth session the South Pacific Forum had adopted the Waigani Convention, he said that that Convention reflected the importance which Australia and the other States members of the South Pacific Forum attached to the preservation of the South Pacific from the harmful effects of hazardous and radioactive waste.

27. Australia was totally committed to that objective, just as it was to achieving an end to all nuclear testing, not only in the South Pacific area but globally in all environments, for all time.

28. Mr. KYRYCHENKO (Ukraine) said that his delegation regarded the work of the Scientific Committee as an important contribution to the expansion of knowledge and ideas concerning the levels, effects and dangers of atomic radiation for present and future generations. That work would, however, be more complete and comprehensive if it took into consideration the great scope of the work and

experience of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation in dealing with the Chernobyl accident and minimizing its aftermath.

29. The decision of the President of Ukraine to establish an International Research and Technology Centre for Nuclear and Radiation Accidents at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant provided a real opportunity for individual countries and the entire world community for further specific and mutually beneficial cooperation to implement programmes and projects aimed at joint examination, mitigation and minimization of the after-effects of the Chernobyl accident and their impact on human beings and the environment.

30. Having approved the concept of the activities of the International Centre, the Government of Ukraine had identified the country's interests and created favourable conditions for multilateral cooperation within the framework of the Centre. It invited interested States, as well as international and non-governmental organizations, to work out jointly potential areas for research and to take an active part in the activities of the Centre.

31. The release into the atmosphere of nuclear fuel from Unit 4 of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant had resulted in the contamination of a significant portion of the territory of Ukraine, and the state of health of those affected was causing great concern. Ukraine was approaching the period when sharp growth was to be expected in diseases related to the radiation from Chernobyl.

32. Ukraine was, however, not currently in a position to perform full medical and genetic monitoring and to provide medical assistance to the affected population on the scale that was required, since it lacked drugs as well as diagnostic and medical equipment.

33. Ukraine noted with gratitude the contribution made by Member States and by organizations of the United Nations system to study mitigation and minimization of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, including the activities of regional and other organizations, as well as activities on a bilateral basis and programmes being executed by non-governmental organizations.

34. Mr. MAMDOT (Pakistan) said that the existing large stockpiles of nuclear weapons must be gradually dismantled and destroyed in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the threat to man and the environment from atomic radiation. Pakistan strongly supported and endorsed the measures taken in that direction by the major nuclear Powers, but there was still a long way to go before the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world was achieved.

35. The profound changes that had transformed international relations and ushered in an era of greater international cooperation provided favourable conditions for a solution to the problem of atomic radiation and the removal of the threat it posed to mankind. Such cooperation should be aimed not only at the minimization of the risks but also at the promotion of the peaceful uses of nuclear technology for the common benefit of all mankind.

36. Pakistan welcomed the current moratorium on nuclear testing, which should lead to the early completion of work on the comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty. In line with its support for that endeavour, Pakistan was convinced of

the need for countries to conclude regional nuclear-test-ban agreements. Pakistan had put forward a number of substantive proposals with the objective of establishing a nuclear non-proliferation regime in South Asia.

37. The developed countries should share information on the peaceful uses of nuclear technology in such areas as energy, medicine, agriculture and other scientific fields with the developing countries, and offer them maximum assistance in harnessing nuclear energy for peaceful uses for the betterment of their peoples.

38. The exchange of technology and information related to the safety of nuclear facilities, including the provision of spare parts for such facilities, was also of great importance. His delegation commended IAEA on its efforts to ensure the dissemination of information related to safety. The provision of adequate safety standards at nuclear sites worldwide was a common objective and was in the interest of all countries.

39. Instead of imposing sanctions on the developing countries to prevent them from acquiring nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and for development, thereby compelling them to acquire cheap nuclear technology equipped with minimum safety features and thus maximizing the risk of accidents, the developed countries must provide the developing countries with state-of-the-art nuclear technology equipped with the highest safety standards.

40. Mr. ZAHRAN (Egypt) said that Egypt, as one of the founding members of the Scientific Committee, had supported and continued to support its important role in studying problems of atomic radiation that could have catastrophic consequences for the very existence of life on earth.

41. He made a special reference to the Middle East, where the presence of unsafeguarded nuclear facilities continued to pose a potential threat to the life and safety of millions of people in the region.

42. A new image of the Middle East as a peaceful and safer region was slowly crystallizing. Progress towards that goal was, however, obstructed by ambiguous policies that sought to represent the existence of an unsafeguarded nuclear programme in the Middle East as a fait accompli. Those policies posed a serious threat to the new regional order emerging in the Middle East. Ambiguity and opacity must give way to openness and transparency, and Egypt called upon all States in the region to take steps in that direction.

43. Egypt strongly believed that the existing nuclear programmes in the Middle East should operate under the full-scope safeguards regime of IAEA. That would constitute an important step towards ensuring the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and safety in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

44. Egypt commended the work of the Scientific Committee and encouraged it to continue the pursuit of its lofty goals. In that spirit, his delegation joined the sponsors of the draft resolution under consideration by the Committee.

45. Mr. DELAUNAY (France), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that some delegations had expressed fears regarding the potential impact of the

nuclear tests being conducted by France in the South Pacific, referring in that connection to the effects of the atmospheric tests carried out in the same region some decades previously. Their fears were unfounded inasmuch as the French nuclear tests were taking place underground in geological conditions that provided all the necessary safeguards. Of all the testing grounds of the nuclear Powers, the French nuclear testing ground in the South Pacific had been the subject of the most intensive independent scientific research. The research had found no trace of a geological or radiological impact or of an impact on wildlife. That conclusion had been endorsed in the report by a group of Australian scientists to the meeting of Ministers of the Environment of the South Pacific Forum held in August 1995 in Brisbane. As was known, France had proposed to the Director General of IAEA that an independent international scientific mission should be organized to assess the impact of the tests when they had been completed within a few months. In August, France had been the first nuclear Power to call for an end to all nuclear tests and explosions under the future comprehensive test-ban treaty.

46. Mr. RAI (Papua New Guinea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the preceding statement merely repeated what the representative of France had said at the previous meeting. The scientific research to which he had referred had not been made available to all countries in the region so that they could verify the scope of the research or establish that the testing would not create problems of radiation in the future, as had occurred in the Marshall Islands. The States of the South Pacific had unanimously opposed the continuation of nuclear testing by France or any other countries.

47. Mr. ROWE (Australia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, rejected the statement that fears concerning the French nuclear tests were unfounded. The fears were extremely serious and stemmed largely from Australia's hostility to nuclear testing in any environment and under any circumstances. With regard to the references to the Brisbane meeting, the Declaration adopted at that meeting had made clear mention of France's commitments under the Nouméa Convention. If, as the representative of France maintained, the testing was so ecologically harmless, France's failure to fulfil its commitments under that Convention was incomprehensible.

48. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had concluded its general debate on agenda item 82.

Draft resolution A/C.4/50/L.2

49. The CHAIRMAN announced that Canada, Egypt, Japan, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Russian Federation and Thailand had joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.4/50/L.2.

50. Draft resolution A/C.4/50/L.2 was adopted without a vote.

51. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 82.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.